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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MINSK 000358

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/29/2016  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#)  
SUBJECT: 480 PEOPLE SENTENCED

REF: A. MINSK 331

- [1](#)B. MINSK 307
- [1](#)C. MINSK 337
- [1](#)D. MINSK 342
- [1](#)E. MINSK 192

Classified By: AMBASSADOR GEORGE KROL FOR REASONS 1.4 (B,D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: As of March 28, nine Minsk district courts had convicted in two days of trials 480 people for participating in post-presidential election demonstrations. Human rights lawyers have called the authorities' treatment of detainees "barbaric" and claim detainees are regularly denied food, water, and access to toilets. OSCE Minsk Office officials visited the detained on March 29 and have concluded the prison conditions clearly fail to meet OSCE standards, but they are reluctant to describe the prisoners, situation as dire or extreme. The Prosecutor General told reporters on March 29 that 500 people, including 21 foreigners, were detained on March 19-25 and threatened to prosecute presidential candidate Aleksandr Milinkevich for leading unsanctioned demonstrations. Authorities continue to arrest demonstrators and opposition activists but ignore the actions of pro-GOB minions. The BKGB terrorism division, for example, searched Malady Front members' houses, seized material, and filed charges against four members. Three minors were arrested near the Russian Embassy for protesting Russia's support of Lukashenko, but the pro-government youth organization BRSM was allowed to protest at the U.S. and other Western Embassies without police intervention. Police are investigating the alleged March 25 "beating" of state media "correspondents", but seem to ignore the fact that 41 independent journalists have been beaten, fined, and/or arrested since March 14. End Summary.

Human Rights Activists and GOB Announces Figures  
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[1](#)2. (U) Human rights NGO Vyasna reported on March 29 that 480 people who were arrested following the tent city razing on March 24 and the March 25 protest (refs A-D) were sentenced from three to 15 days in jail following speedy trials on March 27 and 28. The most common charge was participation in an unsanctioned meeting. Several detainees were fined and no acquittals were reported. A list of detainees and their sentences can be found on Vyasna's website [www.spring96.org/by/news/4065/](http://www.spring96.org/by/news/4065/).

[1](#)3. (U) During a March 29 press conference, Prosecutor General Petr Miklashevich told reporters that law enforcement agencies arrested over 500 people on March 19-25 for participating in unsanctioned meetings. According to Miklashevich, 288 people received 10-day sentences, 112

received 15-day sentences, and 53 minors were released. Twenty-one foreigners were detained, including seven Ukrainians, six Poles, four Russians, two Georgians, one Lithuanian, and one Canadian. Four foreigners were deported without being charged and two minors (one Pole and one Ukrainian) were released. Fourteen foreigners were sentenced from three to 15 days. Miklashevich claimed that those who were in the vicinity of the demonstrations and mistakenly arrested were also released.

#### Authorities' Behavior "Sadistic"

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¶4. (U) Human rights lawyer Valentin Stefanovich told online news source Belapan on March 28 that it was difficult to list those arrested and their sentences, as the police and courts continue to withhold information. Many parents still do not know where their children are being held five days after their arrests. Human rights lawyer Vladimir Labkovich told human rights NGO Charter 97's press center that the authorities' actions were "barbaric" and "sadistic." He called the detainees' treatment "a form of torture" and noted that many were beaten, deprived of food and water, and denied access to toilets. Stefanovich reported that he and fellow human rights defenders had created a list of 53 judges who they feel should be banned from entering the EU.

#### OSCE Minsk Office Visits Detained, Notes Unsuitable Conditions

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¶5. (C) OSCE Minsk Office Deputy Director Vahram Abadjian described for Pol/Econ Chief on March 29 the unsuitable prison conditions<sup>8</sup> for those arrested in the recent demonstrations. On March 29, OSCE Ambassador Ake Peterson

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led a small delegation of OSCE Minsk officials, including Abadjian, to the BKGB's Okryestina detention center, the main detention center for those arrested during post-election protest rallies. (Note: To the OSCE's surprise, the Ministry of Interior took only seven days to review and approve the OSCE's letter of request to visit those detained in Okryestina.) Based on several conversations with detention center officials and the incarcerated, the OSCE confirmed reports that the detention center remains overcrowded (approximately 36 to 46 more prisoners than maximum occupancy) and was short on food for the prisoners for the first few days of the massive intake of detainees. However, the OSCE's preliminary conclusion is that much of the alleged mistreatment can be attributed to an unexpected and sharp increase in the number of prisoners.

¶6. (C) When asked about reports of detainees being beaten inside the detention center, or women being denied toilet paper, Abadjian said the detainees they interviewed said they were not subject to such abuse and they did not know of anyone who was treated in such a manner. Abadjian noted he met with Ten Plus Coalition senior member Anatoly Lebedko and student activist Tatiana Kholma (who was expelled from a state university in late 2005 for attending a student conference in France), among other political detainees. Most reported the prison authorities treated everyone in the detention center, including non-political detainees, in a universal manner, and some repeat political offenders<sup>8</sup> noted the behavior of the prison guards was better than on previous occasions. Abadjian stressed his office was still debating over the final conclusions of their report to OSCE Vienna on the status of detained, but he believed the criticism of the regime will be limited to noting the prison conditions did not meet OSCE standards.

#### Trials Ended?

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¶7. (C) Post has been unable to find out when and where the trials are taking place. Stefanovich and Labkovich are

having the same trouble, as the courts are still not releasing information. The courts themselves may not know when detainees will be tried as it depends on whether a transfer bus full of detainees shows up at the court or not. A lawyer in the OSCE Minsk Office, who is closely monitoring the court cases and also experiencing similar difficulties, told Poloff on March 29 that they suspect the trials have ended, but they too cannot confirm this. OSCE Deputy Abadjian told Pol/Econ Chief that despite reports to the contrary, judges are not conducting trials and sentencing detainees in the detention centers. The detainees are transported to a nearby courthouse for their hearing, although he confirmed the trials are conducted in a matter of minutes.

#### Milinkevich Could Be Prosecuted

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¶8. (U) Prosecutor General Miklashevich on March 29 threatened 10 Coalition presidential candidate Aleksandr Milinkevich with possible prosecution for leading two unsanctioned demonstrations on March 2 and March 25. Miklashevich claimed Milinkevich violated the law after receiving warnings from the GOB.

#### BKGB Prosecutes Malady Front Leaders

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¶9. (U) The BKGB on March 28 began prosecuting four Malady Front leaders Dmitry Dashkevich, Sergei Lisichonok, Boris Goretsky, and Oleg Korbun for running an unregistered, non-governmental association that encroaches on Belarusians' rights and duties as citizens. (Note: Four activists of the unregistered NGO Partnership were arrested for the same charge in February and are still awaiting trial (ref E).) On March 27, the BKGB's Directorate for Constitutional System Protection and Terrorism Prevention searched the activists' apartments and seized printed material and computers. If convicted, all four activists could face up to three years in prison.

#### Entire Family Jailed

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¶10. (U) An entire Gomel family is now sitting in jail. Victor Zhilinsky, a member of Milinkevich's party, was arrested on March 18 en route to a district election

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commission to obtain observation accreditation. He reportedly received an invitation from someone claiming to be a member of the commission. While walking to the commission, an unknown man dropped a beer bottle at Zhilinsky's feet and immediately accused the activist of knocking the bottle out of his hands. Police soon arrived and arrested Zhilinsky for allegedly using obscene language.

¶11. (U) Zhilinsky's wife, Svetlana, and daughter, Yekaterina, were later arrested on March 24 when security forces raided the tent city on October Square. Svetlana was sentenced to seven days in jail on March 27. Yekaterina was also sentenced on March 27, but the court would not release any further information.

#### Demonstrators At Russian Embassy Jailed, BRCM Demonstrators Go Free

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¶12. (U) On March 28, three minors Nika Lozovskaya, Ruslan Matveyev, and Olga Morduyeva were arrested while demonstrating near the Russian Embassy. The activists unfurled a banner that said "You supported the dictator today. Will you support the criminal tomorrow?" One activist doused a Russian flag in a bucket of soapy water as if washing it and then pulled out a Soviet flag from the bucket. All three activists are minors and, according to

Belarusian law, were to be released later in the day. However, online news source Interfax reported on March 29 that the 16-year-old Lozovskaya would stand trial for allegedly not obeying police officers. According to Belarusian law, minors are not to be prosecuted in court.

¶13. (U) The pro-Lukashenko Belarusian Republican Youth Movement (BRSM) on March 26 and 27 picketed the U.S. and Western Embassies, calling for an end to alleged "international interference." Police, however, did not intervene nor did they make any arrests. Instead, the BRSM demonstrations got positive coverage on all state-controlled TV channels.

#### Police Investigate "Beating" of State Media Crew

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¶14. (U) The authorities on March 28 launched an investigation into the alleged "beating" of state owned Belarusian TV's (BT) "journalists" during the March 25 demonstration. BT's news program Panorama on March 27 claimed that opposition protesters on March 25 punched and kicked the BT media crew, causing one "head injuries." The pro-government Belarusian Union of Journalist condemned the incident. Witnesses and independent journalists report that protesters only threw snowballs at the media crew. The Belarusian Association of Journalists on March 28 reported that as many as 41 independent journalists, including 12 foreigners, were arrested, fined, or assaulted in Belarus between March 14 and

¶27.  
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